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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7946th meeting
Tuesday, 23 May 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rosselli	(Uruguay)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 28 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/373)

Letter dated 4 May 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/400)

Letter dated 18 May 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/440)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of the victims of terrorism in Manchester, United Kingdom

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I vigorously condemn the atrocious terrorist attack committed in Manchester, United Kingdom, perpetrated against young innocent people. The members of the Security Council express their deepest condolences to the families of those who died and to the people and Government of the United Kingdom. I would like to ask members of the Council to stand and observe a moment of silence in memory of the victims.

The members of the Security Council observed a moment of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/373, which contains the text of a letter dated 28 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council; document S/2017/400, which contains the text of a letter dated 4 May 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council; and document S/2017/440, which contains the text of a letter dated 18 May 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

Ms. Nakamitsu: Let me also start by expressing my sincere condolences to the families of the victims of the horrific terrorist attack in Manchester yesterday and my strong solidarity with the people and the Government of the United Kingdom.

Let me thank the President and members of the Security Council for this opportunity to brief them, for the first time in my capacity as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. I will also provide them with an update on the activities of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

I am pleased to be joined today by Mr. Edmond Mulet, who was appointed on 1 May by the Secretary-General as the Head of the JIM's independent three-member panel. Although I will briefly inform the Council of the JIM's current activities, Mr. Mulet will be able to answer any questions members might have regarding the work of the JIM.

I also note that on 8 May, Mr. Stefan Mogl was appointed as a member of the JIM Leadership Panel. Mr. Mogl will be based in the The Hague.

I will first turn to the progress related to resolution 2118 (2013) and the elimination of Syria's declared chemical weapons programme. I have discussed these issues with the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on several occasions, and he has provided valuable updates on and insight into OPCW's activities. The working-level engagement between the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the OPCW remains positive and proactive. I have also engaged with the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, as well as with most members of the Security Council. These discussions have strengthened my understanding of the circumstances and the ways in which they are evolving.

As the Secretary-General's last letter notes, the situation with regard to the destruction of the chemical weapons production facilities remains unchanged. The OPCW Technical Secretariat has verified the destruction of 24 out of 27 declared production facilities.

However, the prevailing security situation continues to preclude safe access to three remaining sites, consisting of one aircraft hangar and two above-ground stationary facilities.

The work to address unresolved issues related to Syria's declaration and subsequent amendments had been expected to move forward with the resumption of high-level consultations in The Hague. Three rounds of such consultations had previously taken place between April and June 2016, with the aim of resolving all outstanding issues related to Syria's declaration. The OPCW Director General then submitted a report to the OPCW Executive Council in July 2016, which noted that those issues remained unresolved and which urged a change in approach by the Syrian Arab Republic.

In March, the Director General sent a letter to the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, His Excellency Mr. Faisal Mekdad, inviting him and his delegation to resume these high-level consultations in early May. However, it was decided that these consultations should be temporarily postponed in order to ensure that the discussions would be as fruitful and productive as possible. New dates for the resumption of the high-level consultations have not yet been decided upon. The Secretary-General has repeatedly encouraged cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW on resolving these outstanding issues.

I turn now to the work of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM) in Syria. Since the time of the last briefing to the Council on this issue (see S/PV.7915), two reports of the Fact-finding Mission were transmitted to the Secretary-General by the Director-General and subsequently circulated to the Security Council.

First, on 2 May, the Director General transmitted the report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria regarding the incident of 16 September 2016. This report was produced further to an investigation by an FFM team into an allegation of the use of chemical weapons in the area of Um-Housh, in the Aleppo countryside, on 16 September 2016. Following a request for an investigation, by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, an OPCW FFM team deployed to Damascus on two occasions: from 11 to 19 December 2016 and from 6 to 12 January 2017. During these two deployments, the team conducted interviews, collected testimonies and reviewed documents and other information provided by the Syrian authorities. Owing to the prevailing security situation, the FFM team was not able to visit the site of the alleged incident.

The FFM team also reviewed blood-sample analyses of two female casualties reported to have been involved in the alleged attack. In addition, the FFM team conducted a non-destructive evaluation and sampling of a mortar reported to be connected to the alleged incident. This mortar was handed over to the team by experts of the Russian Federation's chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological team. Laboratory analysis indicated that the mortar contained sulfur mustard.

The Secretary-General has also circulated to the Security Council a letter from the OPCW Director General (S/2017/440, annex)), attaching a status update of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic regarding a reported incident in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April.

After having undertaken a preliminary assessment, an FFM team was mobilized to investigate the incident. The team was deployed to a neighbouring country, where it conducted interviews with casualties and witnessed the collection of biomedical samples from casualties from the alleged incident. The team also received biological-environmental samples from dead animals reported to have been close to the site of the incident and received environmental samples from close to the suspected impact point. The team attended the autopsies of three alleged victims, witnessed the extraction of biomedical samples from those bodies and received the autopsy reports. As the Director General has announced already, the analysis of samples showed exposure to sarin or a sarin-like substance.

This is not a final report; there is still work to be done. The FFM team has collected information and conducted interviews, and all materials and information are currently being analysed. The Director General also indicated to me that the FFM team is planning for a possible visit to Khan Shaykhun. As Council members are aware, Khan Shaykhun is not under Government control. In an exchange of letters, the OPCW Director General requested, on 29 April, the support of the United Nations in the form of security, logistical and operational assistance. On 4 May, the Secretary-General, in his letter of reply, indicated his willingness to provide such support and indicated that planning within relevant offices of the Secretariat was already

under way. In this regard, I remain in regular contact with the Director-General in order to help ensure that any visit to the site by the FFM team would be accompanied by the most stringent security assurances.

I will speak very briefly on the work of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. Since our recent respective appointments, Mr. Mulet and I have been in regular contact, and we intend to ensure a smooth coordination between the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the JIM. The Office for Disarmament Affairs fully supports the work of the JIM and fully respects its independence.

The JIM has been provided with the two recent reports of the OPCW FFM of which I have just spoken. I am informed that the Mechanism is now studying these reports and will keep the Security Council informed of its next steps. In addition, the Mechanism will be reaching out for information of interest to its investigation, as was done in the past. In his letter to the Security Council of 28 April, the Secretary-General called upon all States to support the critical OPCW FFM and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. I likewise call on all to support the Mechanism's important task and extend their full cooperation.

We must not allow ourselves to become inured to the ongoing allegations of the use of chemical weapons. This is an issue about which the United Nations cannot be neutral. The use of chemical weapons by any party, Government forces, terrorist groups or armed opposition groups, for that matter, cannot and will not be justified regardless of provocation or any circumstances. Their re-emergence is indefensible and cannot be viewed as anything other than a violation of the most basic international law and a serious deviation from the internationally agreed broader path towards the goal of a world free of chemical weapons. As such, this is not an issue to be politicized. The international community must have confidence that this goal is one that remains within our reach and that those who stand in its way will be identified and held accountable. Its importance is greater than ever.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia joins in the condemnation of the terrorist attack that took place in Manchester yesterday. Our thoughts and sympathies are with the families of the victims, and we wish a speedy recovery to the injured. We offer our sincere solidarity to the people and the Government of the United Kingdom.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia thanks the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her briefing. We take this opportunity to offer our support to the Head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, Mr. Edmond Mulet, in the work and functions he recently assumed.

We take note of the work done to date by the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) with regard to the events that took place in September 2016 in Um-Housh and on 4 April 2017 in Khan Shaykhun in the Syrian Arab Republic.

With respect to the confirmed use of mustard gas and sarin in the incidents reported, Bolivia expresses its firm and absolute condemnation of the use of chemical weapons or chemical elements as weapons, which is unjustifiable and criminal wherever, whenever and by whomever it is committed because it is a serious violation of human rights, international law and international peace and security. Those responsible for these criminal acts should be duly investigated, brought to justice and punished with the greatest rigour.

We reiterate the obligation of all States to fight the proliferation of chemical weapons in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, which affirms that the complete and effective prohibition of the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer and use of chemical weapons and their destruction represent a necessary step towards the fulfilment and strengthening of the principles and purposes of Charter of the United Nations.

In that regard, we reiterate our support for the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism as it carries out its tasks in accordance with its mandate and undertakes its work in the most methodical, technical and faithful way possible through an independent, impartial, complete and conclusive investigation.

In conclusion, we reiterate that the only option for resolving the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and preventing further casualities is through an inclusive political transition led by the Syrian people, in respect for their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Uruguay.

On behalf of Uruguay, I would like to begin by expressing our total condemnation of the terrorist attack last night in Manchester. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims, as well as to the people and the Government of the United Kingdom, for this horrible, cowardly attack, and wish the dozens who were injured a speedy recovery.

I would like to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing and to wish her the all the best in her new position. The use of chemical weapons, wherever it occurs, is a grave threat to international peace and security and a serious violation of international law. Uruguay therefore firmly condemns as a war crime every instance of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons in the Syrian conflict affecting the civilian population, and reiterates that those responsible for such aberrant crimes must be brought to justice. Until the entire Syrian chemical arsenal, declared or not, has been destroyed or safeguarded, the Security Council cannot definitively close its dossier on the subject. In that regard, we encourage the Syrian authorities to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to clarify the omissions and discrepancies in the initial Syrian declaration.

Unfortunately, a little more than a month ago, as well as previously in February, the Council failed in its responsibility to take steps to investigate those aberrant crimes. That is why we want to reiterate that the existence of the veto reduces the functionality and effectiveness of the Security Council's work and unbalances its efforts even more. In future, the members that possess this privilege should refrain from using it in cases of war crimes, which the attack on 4 April in Khan Shaykhun clearly was. Uruguay urges the Council to continue its efforts to reach a consensus that will enable its members to overcome their differences with a view to preventing new incidents involving chemical weapons in Syria and combating impunity for those who are responsible for such atrocities.

We do not yet have enough evidence to enable us to assert categorically who is responsible for the attack on Khan Shaykhun. Several Council members and various international organizations have already submitted reports in which they reached certain conclusions. However, the OPCW's confirmation that sarin gas or a similar substance was used will undoubtedly help to clarify who organized the attack. In the coming months, it will be the job of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism to determine who was responsible so that the Council can finally take action on it, something has been too often postponed.

Uruguay reaffirms its full support for the Joint Investigative Mechanism's important and impartial work and its trust in the leadership and proven experience of Mr. Edmond Mulet, Head of the Mechanism's independent panel, in ensuring that in the next few months the perpetrators of these and other incidents will be investigated in accordance with the Council's mandate. The conclusions will again enable the council to decide on the steps it should take to bring them to justice. While this task has turned out to be complicated, it should not be impossible to accomplish it, considering that the Council has the tools it needs to do it.

We reiterate our call on all Council members to rise above internal differences in order to arrive at a political solution that can end the violence, help to consolidate a ceasefire, prioritize the protection of civilians and give hope to the hundreds of thousands of victims that the perpetrators of the serious crimes that have been committed in Syria can finally be brought to justice.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.